Introduction

I took part of a team video project as part of the subject assessment. I formed a group with four other students, all from China: Liu, Nana, Peggy and Jacky. I took the initiative to ask Liu and Nana to form the team with me, because I thought it would be interesting, for this assignment, to have a group of people that I have never worked with before, instead of my usual teammates. Also, I thought that this group would be a good opportunity to learn about Chinese people and their culture. We were able to finalise our video within a single meeting, and overall, I really enjoyed this project with my team. For this critical reflective writing, I will discuss the team goals, try to identify each of the Tuckman's stages of group development (Tuckman, 1965), and reflect on roles and behaviours within the group. Using this reflection, I will finally analyse how I think the performance could be improved in my next team project.

Group development

When we met all together, I found everyone very enthusiastic about the project, just like I was. Our first discussions were centred around the goals we wanted to achieve. Each of us had his word to say, and overall, our goals were very clear from the beginning, and common to all of us: we all wanted to make something fun to watch, rather than too serious. We wanted to get the highest score, and in order to do so, we agreed that we should be relevant with the topic, length of the video, and that everyone should be evenly involved in the video. We also aimed to complete the video during the first meeting if possible. We then brought our topic suggestion, and as the majority wished to focus on conflict management, we agreed on this topic. This was our Forming stage, we reached an agreement very easily, and briefly discussed how we wanted to process. In my opinion, these goals look SMART compatible: Specific, measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely. "Those goals should be challenging (modest ones don't motivate) but not so difficult that the team becomes dispirited. They also must be consequential: People have to care about achieving a goal." (Haas & Mortensen, 2016). I think our goals setting and our forming stage were a success, and it helped us start with a motivated and energized team.

Then we entered into the Storming stage, with a few little conflicts emerging. First, I kindly asked my groupmates to use Chinese language the least possible, as I was feeling a little uncomfortable with some side conversations that I could not understand. They all agreed and this issue was solved easily. Then, we started talking about the content of our video, and at the beginning, I was not very talkative, as the group was entirely made of Chinese people, who I am not used to work with. I felt the need to observe their norms first, and decided to let others take the first initiatives. I didn't know personalities and cultures, and feared being different, or not understood well. I quickly found out that they were actually very accommodating, and was surprised to see that they were relying a lot on my opinion. My feeling is that I was implicitly assigned the task of leader, coordinator, by the way they were waiting for my opinion, or instructions on how to start. Therefore, I naturally took some of the leadership together with Jacky, who was also taking initiatives. The three girls were relying on us for the suggestions and decisions, but were very involved and enthusiastic. It was very easy for me to have my suggestions accepted by all. In fact, I found that my biggest challenge was to make sure that they really liked the way we were planning to do. I was sometimes not sure if they were simply

agreeing to be accommodating, or if they really thought that it was an effective way to work on the project. My intention was not to decide by myself, rather I really wanted the project to reflect the contribution of each of the members.

Peiyu and Liu were the shiest members of the team. I think their English skills were one of the reasons why they were not very confident with talking in the video clip. Jacky and me reassured them that they were good enough for it, and that we would always watch the scenarios together and record it again if they wish to. That can be identified as our Norming stage, I felt that after our first attempt, everyone was comfortable with this way of working and there was mutual trust within the team.

After recording the first scenario, I found the group becoming very productive. Jacky and me leading, we got everyone to participate quite equally in the videos, and we were inspired enough to find the ideas for the next ones. The suggestions of the two of us seemed to satisfy all members. We can say that we reached our Performing stage. We were limited by time, and we all aimed to finish all the recordings during this meeting because we were all very busy with other assignments coming around the same time. After completing all the scenarios and watching them together, we agreed to say that we were all satisfied with our production. We then discussed the video edition, then completed the edition from home.

My role

As detailed earlier, during the forming stage, I planned to stay back a little and observe the norms of our group. My main fear, in group situations, is to be isolated to the rest of the group. As a habit, I don't want to take any risks of creating a conflict, especially at the early stages of group development. But from other members' behaviours towards me, I understood that I had to be a leader in this team. When looking back, I found myself quite comfortable in this role, for two reasons. First, I felt legitimacy from the fact that the members, implicitly, gave me this responsibility, genuinely. Second, all of my teammates were very accommodating and there was no strong challenges to my opinions. In association with Jacky, I initiated most of the ideas for the scenarios, and tried to push for the shiest team members to participate more in the acting, in order to make it equal to everyone.

How performance could be improved?

From the first impression, it appeared to me that we performed very well in the achievement of this project: we were able to complete the work within one meeting. Everyone participated equally in the video. We reached our goals as we found our video quite fun when we watched it together, and we got the mark we aimed for. I truly believe we all enjoyed doing this project together. It appears to me that the team kept the same motivation throughout the project. But the way Jacky and I, as leaders, performed on this field is difficult to measure, as it was on a quite short amount of time. By the critical way I analysed our different stages of group development, however, it seems that some aspects of team work and leadership could be performed better.

In my opinion, the main area that we could have improved, is on the members' contribution to decision making. Me and Jacky initiated most of the contents of the scenarios. There was a clear lack of challenge on our decisions, and we used it to perform the tasks quickly in order to fit in our time constraints. The girls' enthusiasm made us think that nobody was unhappy with the project advancement. But lack of challenge, on the other side, can lead to the team overlooking some better

alternatives to problems (Cole 2010, p.588). The girls could, probably, have given us some more ideas and led to better scenarios. To get the best out of the team, I should, as a leader, have encouraged more debate, more viewpoints, especially from the shiest ones. In order to get more contribution from introverts, “the key is to make them feel comfortable enough to contribute” (Knight, 2015). In small groups, you could simply take the time to ask them directly some more questions to encourage them to speak their mind. In bigger group, this could make introverted people more uncomfortable. In this case, one option is to tell them, in advance, what you would like from them, so they have time to think in an environment more relaxing for them. Another way is to get everyone to write their ideas and suggestions on papers (Knight, 2015). And this is only possible with patience, empathy, and listening from the leader is at least as important to make introverted comfortable enough.

Conclusion

I played a role of leader in this team project. Our team dynamic was very positive throughout the project, and our goals were successfully achieved. I did not face motivation issues, and a very few number of conflicts emerged within the team. This is, in my opinion, to be attributed to a fantastic group composition, and was facilitated by the fact that the video did not require a long time to be completed. As a result, my role of leader was not challenged very strongly, but I came to identify one main aspect of leadership that could definitely be improved next time. We surely lost some of the team members’ creativity by moving forward in absence of challenging opinions, instead of stimulating the expression of different viewpoints. Encouraging the most introverted people to express their viewpoint, making sure every member contributes to the team work, not only with actions but also and especially with their creativity, is a crucial aspect of successful leadership, and leaders should allow the necessary time and efforts for this purpose.

Reference list

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